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PP RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHDBU RUEHDF RUEHIK RUEHLH RUEHLN

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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9758

INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE

RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE

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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 3025

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0841

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RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 1291

RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC

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RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC

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RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 1936

UNCLAS ASHGABAT 001271

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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STATE FOR SCA/CEN, EEB

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV SOCI TX

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN LIFTS REQUIREMENT FOR FOREIGNERS TO STAY IN HOTELS

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (SBU) The Head of the Department for Registration of Foreign Citizens at Turkmenistan's State Service of Registration of Foreign Citizens told an Embassy employee on November 20 that the government has lifted its ban requiring all foreign visitors to stay in hotels, rather than allowing them to stay in rented apartments or with private families. From now on, foreigners may rent apartments, as long as apartment owners are registered and pay taxes on their rental income. This new policy also applies to single males, who previously have been subject to special (negative) law enforcement attention -- and accusations of engaging in prostitution if they were found in apartments or private dwellings.

¶3. (SBU) The former policy also posed a problem for the Embassy during the recent visit of Secretary Bodman. Migration officials closely scrutinized the flight crew and were uncomfortable with the idea that these men, here without family, would be staying in rented apartments (no hotel rooms were available at the time). It took some explaining by the Embassy to get the flight crew through immigration.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: The ban has come up in practically every discussion with foreign businessmen, and it was a significant quality of life issue for foreigners in the business community. The decision may well have been a matter of necessity: with only limited hotel space in Ashgabat and elsewhere in Turkmenistan, the growing number of foreign businessmen and foreign government delegations flocking to Turkmenistan were facing declining availability. This decision definitely is a step toward making Turkmenistan a more attractive place for businessmen to invest and live, and post hopes that it is a sign of more changes to come. END COMMENT.

CURRAN